

October 2012

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Chairman's Message

Joe Collins, Governing Board Chairman



With the start of October, the South Florida Water Management District begins our fiscal new year, FY2013. At a budget hearing held on September 25, the Board finalized and adopted the \$567.3 million budget that will fund the agency's mission for the next 12 months. A full 75 percent of the FY2013 budget is dedicated to benefiting ecosystem restoration, protecting water resources and enhancing flood control operations. These mission-focused activities are fundamental to the District's ongoing work of protecting South Florida's citizens, economy and environment.

One of our partners in flood control operations is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the agency responsible for Lake Okeechobee management. With a sharp rise in the lake's level following Tropical Storm Isaac and subsequent wet-season rainfall, the Corps has begun discharges from the lake, in accordance with its regulatory schedule, to provide flood control and protect the aging Herbert Hoover Dike.

To reduce freshwater impacts of these releases to the downstream Caloosahatchee Estuary, District engineers identified an opportunity to store water at the site of the C-43 West Basin Reservoir, a future Everglades restoration project. This concept is part of our ongoing efforts to store excess water on private, tribal and public lands. Ranchlands north of Lake Okeechobee have been used in this way since 2005, when the first pilot projects were initiated. In less than a week's time, staff from our Operations, Maintenance and Construction Bureau mobilized to install temporary pumps, obtain necessary permits and flow water onto the site.

Also this month, the Board approved our Priority Water Bodies list for 2013. This list identifies key locations where District scientists will collect and analyze data needed for establishing the technical criteria (called Minimum Flows and Levels, or MFLs) that help protect the resource. While all of South Florida's water bodies are a priority to this agency, the 2013 list serves as our MFL focus for the coming year. Florida Bay and the Caloosahatchee Estuary continue as the two water bodies being analyzed for MFL rule development.

Just prior to our meeting this month, the Board held a workshop with the Loxahatchee River District and visited a portion of the federally designated "wild and scenic" Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River. This protected waterway is the focus of additional water deliveries that will come from the L-8 Reservoir. Last month the Board approved construction of a pump station with six massive pumps for this reservoir, capable of pulling water from 40 feet below the surface and delivering it to the river. When alternate water storage is in place for the Loxahatchee, the L-8 Reservoir will become part of the suite of projects for improving Everglades water quality, part of Governor Scott's restoration strategy.

These are just a few examples of the District's mission-focused work across the region. With a new fiscal year before us, our commitment to ongoing restoration and resource protection for South Florida remains evident and strong.

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SFWMD 2013 Budget Supports Water Resource Priorities

75 percent of \$567.3 million budget invested in flood control and Everglades restoration

At a public hearing on Sept. 25, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board adopted a \$567.3 million budget for Fiscal Year 2013 (Oct. 1, 2012 – Sept. 30, 2013). The annual budget funds the agency's core flood control and water supply missions as well as its continued progress to restore the South Florida ecosystem, which



includes America's Everglades.

"We remain committed to achieving our mission-critical goals without increasing the burden of additional taxes on the people of South Florida," said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Joe Collins. "Mindful of continuing economic challenges, this prudent budget allows the District to move forward with critical flood control operations and important long-term projects to increase water storage and improve Everglades water quality."

The approved \$567.3 million budget contains a significant investment in South Florida's environment, including \$27 million appropriated by the Florida Legislature in support of

Everglades restoration. A full 75 percent of the District's FY2013 budget is dedicated to benefit restoration, protect water resources and enhance flood control operations:

- \$182 million to operate and maintain South Florida's regional flood control system, including \$50 million to refurbish the extensive network of canals, levees and water control structures.
- \$245 million to restore the Everglades ecosystem, including \$87.6 million to implement the first phases of Governor Scott's landmark plan to improve water quality to achieve ultra-low nutrient standards.

With restoration investments of more than \$1.16 billion in the past three years, the District is bringing important restoration projects to construction completion and beginning operations to deliver meaningful environmental returns to South Florida's ecosystem.

- Projects include: expansions of Stormwater Treatment Areas (Compartments B and C); C-111 Spreader Canal; Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Phase I; and Lakeside Ranch Stormwater Treatment Area. The District has invested close to \$392 million toward these projects to date, with \$2.7 million included for FY2013 to complete construction.
- Another \$11.4 million is dedicated in FY2013 to support continued federal partnership construction to restore the Kissimmee River and implement Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan projects, including Picayune Strand, the Indian River Lagoon-South C-44 Reservoir and the Fran Reich Preserve adjacent to the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.
- Building on a \$10 million investment to date, the District is increasing water storage through partnerships with ranch owners to benefit the northern Everglades while maintaining working landscapes and jobs and keeping land on the tax rolls. The District will invest \$8.7 million in FY2013 toward its Dispersed Water Management program.

As part of its budget development, the District last year established a spend-down plan to dedicate accumulated reserves and cash balances toward restoration and water supply priorities. The FY2013 budget includes \$148.8 million in fund balances primarily to implement critical water resource projects.

The District's annual budget is funded by a combination of ad valorem (*property*) taxes, and other revenues such as state and federal sources; licenses and fees; agricultural taxes; balances; and investment income. About 47 percent of the total FY2013 budget comes from property taxes.

The approved millage rates for FY2013 represent 42.89 cents per thousand dollars of value in 15 of the District's 16 counties (the Okeechobee Basin). For a home with a taxable value of \$100,000 (assessed value of \$150,000, less the \$50,000 homestead exemption), the SFWMD portion of the property tax bill would total \$42.89. In Collier County and mainland Monroe County (the Big Cypress Basin), the tax rates represent 33.90 cents per thousand dollars of taxable value. For a similar home in this area, the combined SFWMD and Big Cypress Basin portion of the property tax bill would total \$33.90.

For more information, see:

- [Just the Facts: FY2013 Budget](#)
- [Governor Rick Scott's Letter of Approval](#)

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SFWMD Takes Action to Store Water Headed to Caloosahatchee Estuary

Emergency storage has been configured on restoration project site

With Lake Okeechobee's water level rising from above-average rainfall and discharges from the lake increasing for flood control and protection of the Herbert Hoover Dike, the South



Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has taken emergency steps to capture water from the Caloosahatchee River to reduce freshwater impacts on the downstream estuary. The water is being stored at the site of the C-43 West Basin Reservoir, a future Everglades restoration project.

District engineers identified part of the 11,000-acre project site in Hendry County with capability for creating emergency shallow water storage. Clewiston Field Station crews installed two, 42-inch temporary pumps that are moving up to 300 cubic feet per second from a tributary of the river. Existing infrastructure on the property, plus pumping coordination with the LaBelle private drainage district, will allow for up to 2 feet of water to be stored on 3,500 acres — potentially up to 2 billion gallons of storage. District staff worked to obtain the necessary permits and protect existing wetlands on the site.

"Increasing water storage is a constant challenge that requires creative ideas and innovative engineering solutions," said SFWMD Governing Board Chairman Joe Collins. "With a rapid rise in the lake from Tropical Storm Isaac and weeks of additional rainfall, this opportunity to capture and store lake discharges will provide some relief for the Caloosahatchee. Every bit of storage helps."

Since 2005, the District has been working with a coalition of agencies, environmental organizations, ranchers and researchers to enhance opportunities for storing excess surface water on private, tribal and public lands. Managing water on these lands, known as dispersed water management, is one tool to reduce the amount of water delivered during the wet season into the lake and discharged to coastal estuaries for flood protection. Shallow water retention also provides valuable groundwater recharge for water supply, opportunities for water quality improvement and rehydration of drained systems.

The C-43 West Basin Reservoir, located on former farmland west of LaBelle, is a key project in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. When the restoration project is complete, the reservoir will hold approximately 170,000 acre-feet of water, with maximum depths ranging from 15 feet to 25 feet across the expanse. The restoration project will provide storage needed for the estuary by capturing and storing local basin runoff as well as Lake Okeechobee regulatory releases. This will reduce lake discharges reaching the estuary, improve the health of the Caloosahatchee ecosystem and revitalize fish and oyster habitats by reducing the frequency of undesirable salinity ranges. Releases of water from the reservoir during the dry season will provide essential flows, resulting in improved salinity balance, survival of young fish and shellfish and improved ecological health.

Lake Okeechobee's water level rose quickly during Tropical Storm Isaac and has gained about 3.7 feet since the event in late August. With subsequent wet season rainfall, the lake level on Oct. 17 was 15.89 feet NGVD. Consistent with its operations protocols for this water level, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is currently discharging water from the lake at a rate of approximately 4,000 cubic feet per second to the Caloosahatchee River.

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Opinion: SFWMD Continues Improving Land Resource Management

Melissa L. Meeker, SFWMD Executive Director



The South Florida Water Management District is the largest land owner in South Florida. Over the course of several decades, our land acquisitions have been made to support flood control infrastructure, protect South Florida's water resources and restore the region's impaired ecosystems.

With more than 1.4 million acres in hand, we are today focused on comprehensively evaluating each parcel to assure its most effective use for Florida's taxpayers. Many properties will continue to serve their intended purpose. Others may be leased until needed for project construction, swapped for lands in more critical locations or leveraged to gain the resources needed to carry out restoration work.

To achieve this, we have made significant improvements in our acquisition and land management programs over the past year. Aided by an extensive database of our inventory, we are conducting a comprehensive assessment of all District lands, scheduled for

completion next year. Other enhancements already in place include:

- Updating the agricultural lease policy, providing for greater transparency and public access.
- Organizational changes that better align real estate, land stewardship and land management functions.
- Website posting of land-related documents, including a searchable database of leased lands.

- Updated protocols, with increased public involvement, for leasing and surplusing lands not immediately needed for project purposes.

These steps reflect our implementation of Governor Scott's direction to focus District-wide on reviewing and improving the agency's business, administration and operational practices. We fully recognize the significant financial investment of taxpayer dollars in its public lands. Managing these lands prudently, effectively and in public view is our ongoing commitment.

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September's Average Rainfall Increases Wet Season Totals

A rainy start to October further boosts rainfall totals



Even with mostly average September rainfall, many areas of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) had already received an entire wet season's worth of rainfall by the end of the month. Some communities have received a year's worth of rainfall in six months, SFWMD meteorologists reported.

A rainy start to October has further boosted wet season totals, with above-average rainfall across the region through the first half of the month. Water levels in key areas remain above historic averages for this time of year.

"The challenge this wet season is that many areas of the District have already seen a full season of rainfall, and October can be a very active storm month. We continuously prepare and adjust the system for weather extremes," said Susan Sylvester, SFWMD Chief of the Water Control Operations Bureau.

2012 Wet Season So Far

Overall for the 2012 wet season through the end of September, the SFWMD had seen 37.53 inches of rain District-wide, or 114 percent of average. Nearly all portions of the District had received above-average rainfall.

District weather records show that the six-month period from April, just before the official start to the wet season, through September, surpassed longstanding totals:

- Broward County experienced the wettest April through September since 1955.
- Miami-Dade County experienced the third wettest April through September since 1932.
- Palm Beach County experienced the eighth wettest April through September since 1939.
- Water Conservation Areas 1 and 2 in Palm Beach and Broward counties experienced the wettest April through September since 1957.
- Water Conservation Area 3 experienced the wettest April through September since 1963.

The largest rainfall totals for this year's wet season through September include:

- Eastern Miami-Dade: 136 percent of average, or 13.22 inches above average
- Eastern Broward: 127 percent of average, or 9.24 inches above average
- Eastern Palm Beach: 126 percent of average, or 8.95 inches above average

The Southwest Coast and Big Cypress Basin were slightly behind during that time:

- Western Lee and Collier counties: 90 percent of average, or a deficit of 4.02 inches
- Big Cypress: 94 percent of average, or a deficit of 2.08 inches

September Rainfall

As a whole, the District's 16 counties experienced an average of 6.61 inches of rainfall in September, or 97 percent of the historic average for the month.

The central swath of South Florida, including the Upper Kissimmee Basin near Orlando, the East Caloosahatchee Basin, the Big Cypress Basin and Miami-Dade and Broward counties, received near or slightly above average rainfall for the month. This includes Lake Okeechobee, which stood at 15.89 feet NGVD on Oct. 17, 0.84 feet above its historic average for this date.

Martin, St. Lucie and eastern Palm Beach counties, along with the Southwest Coast's Lee and western Collier counties experienced about an inch or more of rainfall deficit. In Palm Beach County, the drier conditions helped water levels in the area recover back to seasonal levels.

Recreation Opportunities Abounded in South Florida on National Public Lands Day

SFWMD public lands offer numerous opportunities to enjoy the South Florida outdoors year-round



With approximately 621,000 acres of land open to the public, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) joined the Florida Department of Environmental Protection in promoting opportunities to celebrate 2012 National Public Lands Day on Sept. 29.

On the west coast at the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed, outdoor enthusiasts could take a 3-mile guided hike on the Cypress Dome Trails. On the east coast, the SFWMD partnered with NatureScape Broward to plant native wildflowers along the C-11 Canal just east of Flamingo Road.

Nationwide, volunteers are an important component of successful management of public lands. During the past year, volunteers on District-managed lands have logged more than 8,470 hours from October 2011 through August 2012. Their work includes serving as campground hosts, leading bird-watching tours and assisting with trail maintenance, trash cleanups and environmental education.

Throughout South Florida, the District provides recreational access to its public lands while continuing to manage them to support environmental restoration, water supply, water quality and flood control missions. Many of these properties are in their natural state or have enhancements such as picnic tables, informational kiosks, primitive campsites and hiking trails.

Recreational opportunities throughout the District's 16-county region can be found online at www.sfwmd.gov/recreation.